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Ministry of Forests and Range

GROUNDBREAKING AGREEMENT PROTECTS CHEHALIS' HERITAGE

CHEHALIS – The Province and Chehalis Indian Band have agreed to use the Forest and Range Practices Act to protect an area in the Chilliwack Forest District that contains sacred sites of the Chehalis people, the first time the act has been used in such a way, Forests and Range Minister Rich Coleman announced today.

"The protection of Kweh-Kwuch-Hum ensures that Chehalis cultural and spiritual sites and traditions will not be impacted by forest practices or activities," said Coleman. "The preservation of the area, its history and culture is a result of the Province and the Chehalis' commitment to work together, and demonstrates the New Relationship in action."

The province has issued a government actions regulation order under the Forest and Range Practices Act that creates a 1,072-hectare management area on Kweh-Kwuch-Hum (Mount Woodside) in Chilliwack. The regulation order follows a 15-month policy pilot project involving the Province and Chehalis to increase shared knowledge of the location's spiritual areas, practices and forest management. Kweh-Kwuch-Hum was declared a spiritually sensitive designated area by the Chehalis in July 2006 and is integral to their ongoing cultural and spiritual practices, traditions and history.

"Our people have always known about the rich spiritual history of areas such as Kweh-Kwuch-Hum and have been reluctant to share this information with the general public or other government agencies because we feared it would be misused," said Chehalis Chief Willie Charlie. "We entrusted the Province with sacred information because we believed in the process we were embarking on and it is truly a historic milestone to have this celebration today to have Kweh-Kwuch-Hum protected."

The Chehalis have a long history of respecting Kweh-Kwuch-Hum as sacred and there is archaeological evidence of an established and structured community in the area from 1,500 years ago. Events like weddings, name ceremonies, memorials, potlatch celebrations, and spiritual activities such as rites of passage and the Winter Dance ceremonial continue to take place in the area and its longhouses, as they have done for years and generations before. Aboriginal people from all over the region have traditionally come to Chehalis to participate in Winter Dance activities.

Community growth and support over the past 30 years have been attributed in part, to the cultural and spiritual practices associated with the longhouse. Teachings have increased confidence, pride, and cultural identity among Chehalis youth as well as facilitated the transfer of traditional knowledge, skills and practices.

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Prior to the work that resulted in the regulation order, the Chehalis and the Province signed a five-year forestry agreement in 2004 under which the Chehalis received $2.3 million in forestry revenues and access to 138,640 cubic metres of timber. The Chehalis also operate a woodlot and a licensed sort-yard.

Government actions regulations provide direction for the establishment of land designations that protect forest values including First Nations cultural heritage resources, watersheds, ecosystems, fisheries, species at risk and recreation sites or trails.

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Media contact:

Sophia Proctor
Public Affairs Officer
Ministry of Forests and Range
250 387-4592

Chief Willie Charlie
Chehalis Indian Band
604 796-2116

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